

Antal Molnár, *Egy raguzai kereskedőtársaság a hódolt Budán. Scipione Bona és Marino Bucchia vállalkozásának története és dokumentumai (1573-1595). A Ragusan Trading Company in Ottoman Buda. History and Documents of Scipione Bona and Marino Bucchia's Enterprise (1573-1595)*. [Sources on the Medieval and Early Modern History of Budapest, vol. 2]. Budapest: Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 2009. Pages 433.

Research on the history of the Ottoman Hungary is experiencing a golden age, since several new, hitherto unknown source collections have been revealed for future generations. The largest white spot of our knowledge was the close relationship which the Ragusan city-state fostered with the Kingdom of Hungary. Apart from a nineteenth-century source collection focusing mainly on political history, nothing has appeared in Hungarian historiography. Fortunately, the results of international scholarship have also been incorporated into Antal Molnár's book, which offers an insight into a hitherto unknown aspect of the history of Ottoman Hungary. This work is a selection of sources preserved in the State Archives of Dubrovnik (Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku). The introductory study is not without preliminaries,

as the author already dealt with Ragusan merchants in his dissertation published in Hungarian in 2002 (and in French in 2007). Molnár investigated this problem mainly from the perspective of church history, since Ragusan merchants could be regarded as the most important defenders and supporters of Catholic religious life in many cities in the Ottoman Hungary and the Balkans. The dissertation has attracted the attention of Budapest City Archives (*Budapest Főváros Levéltára*), whose support has helped the author to start his archival research resulting with the current book.

A lengthy, about 60-page long introductory study presents the historiography on the topic and the research possibilities of the archives of Dubrovnik, all backed up by international scholarly literature. The author also touches upon the difficulties arising from the sporadic nature of the sources which hinder researchers to form a comprehensive picture of the Ragusan merchants' activity in the Ottoman Hungary. The data in this form are insufficient to reveal the volume and the value of the trade, as well as the overall activity of certain trading companies. Therefore, making full use of the sources will be possible only after doing additional research or after placing them in a much broader context. Despite all these facts, publication of the source collection has been necessary, as it can open up new perspectives in understanding Balkan long-distance trade.

Molnár's book, in fact, is a collection of the scattered documents related to Scipione Bona and Marino Bucchia's trading company in Buda. However, the reconstruction of its activity required a bit of luck. The two Ragusan merchants belonged to the patricians of the city-state, and they participated both in land and sea trade. As a result of their diversified activity, many sources on their enterprise were preserved in the two most extended fonds of the archives: the minutes of loan position and the insurance policies of shipping. These have been supplemented by the copies of briefs found in the archives. Using these sources, the author has sought to form an overall picture, as no Italian sources related to commerce have been published before and no more documents of this quality are to be expected.

The trading company operated in the second half of the sixteenth century, which coincided with the golden age of Ragusan trade. The company participated in raw material export from the Balkan Peninsula to Italy, and supplied the European and African cities of the Ottoman Empire with textiles brought mainly from Florence. About 200 patricians took part in this trade and Scipione Bona, who had inherited the enterprise from his father, belonged to them. In 1573 he established a new enterprise with Marino Bucchia, a fellow-patrician of not so wealthy a family. The company, which was originally interested only in trade between Italy and Ragusa, began to extend its activity to Buda, then a developing market, which was fairly unfamiliar even to their rivals who enjoyed better positions in Belgrade. Bucchia moved to Buda and his presence was vital to the company's success. The trading point in the Ottoman Hungary had only limited independence and according to the contract, Bucchia carried out executive tasks and managed everyday affairs. The negative balance in the foreign trade of the Carpathian Basin is apparent from the fact that the cash paid for the textiles arriving from Italy first had to be sent to Bona who purchased new goods, and the leather import from Buda was taken into the company's profile only later. It is also interesting that in the documents on commercial credit Bona and Bucchia were mainly among borrowers, and they rarely lent any money to their partners. This indicates their shortage of capital, which later also led to considerable disturbances in their activity. Apparently, they managed to generate good business in the beginning, and the considerable amount of loans they received (which was greater than that of the Belgrade merchant colony whose tradesmen were in more favourable positions) shows that creditors regarded Buda as a profitable investment market. However, the borrowed amounts eventually became smaller and the duration of the loan longer, which indicates the deteriorating position of the company in the 1580s.

The sources also deal with the other terminus of the long-distance trade. It was an established custom in the 1580s that the trading company imported textiles from Ancona (at that time the

extended hand of Florence) and other southern Italian ports, grain from Sicily, and oil and soap from Puglia. These were carried to the Adriatic ports, while baize was taken to the Balkan Peninsula, whence various leather goods, wax, flax, and some fleece arrived in Italy. The operation of the company was terminated by Bucchia's death and bankruptcy. Bona sent several stocks of goods to Buda, but deliveries in return became increasingly rare. The problem arose from the fact that Bucchia had let the Ottoman officials and Jewish merchants buy on credit, but he had not been able to collect the considerable debts. Moreover, in order to avoid bankruptcy, Bona borrowed money from the groups he also lent money. The only difference was that his creditors could take reprisals against him. The Ottoman habits can be obviously testified in the field of commerce where everybody had to give presents for everything, but the concessions in return remained occasional. During the liquidation procedure between 1592 and 1595, the company was able to collect 7,100 thalers at double cost. The sources born during the winding-up procedure are among the most exciting documents of the book, as they reveal the business and personal networks managed by Bucchia. It is clear that the majority of both Bucchia's creditors and borrowers were Muslims: out of the twenty creditors there were only two Christians and one Jew. The only difference lies in the fact that while the creditors came exclusively from Buda and Pest, Bucchia let the Pasha of Timișoara, the Sancakbeys of Fehérvár, Szekszárd, Nógrád and Sziget, several Ottoman officials in Zmajevac, Sombor, Bačka and Pécs, as well as many soldiers garrisoned in Fehérvár buy on credit. They were the ones to spread Ragusan goods in local markets and the clothes, harnesses and knives sold by them enlivened the market. Bucchia's system of relations shows that Buda played an important role in the southern trade: its action radius extended to Esztergom and Hatvan in the north and the whole Ottoman Hungary in the south. Thus, a new and little-known form of commercial activity has been revealed which the economic research has neglected so far. There existed a Hungarian society and a southern Slav one in parallel, but the relationship between them was weaker than historians have

thought. Although the rich merchant János Trombitás lived in Nagymaros, and the first major flourishing of Hungarian companies also took place in these years, the documents related to the most significant Ragusan trading company rarely comprise hints about Hungarians. Therefore, the concept of condominium has to be reconsidered; what kind of a co-existence was it, for instance, if the tradesmen of Kálmánca and Pettau, interested in Italian exports of leather and cattle, are missing from Ragusan relations? However, there should have been some kind of connections, as the Ragusan merchants spent large sums on the maintenance of Catholic religious life and a Catholic church, which—as a sign of the end of the era—was confiscated by the Ottomans in 1596, when the Ragusan community also disappeared from Buda.

The sources have been transcribed letter to letter, to the joy of the lovers of early modern Italian language, larded with southern Slav and Turkish loan words. Nevertheless, it might deter ordinary readers. The lengthy glossary (pp. 391-421) and the translation-like registers of the documents related to the activity and the liquidation of the company (3rd unit) make the unique collection available for everyone. The sources of the first unit (pp. 124-161), revealing the loan position of the company, have been worked up in a summarising table and the texts written in good Latin can be interpreted by a skilled reader. It is partly true for the 2nd unit (pp. 161-219) publishing the insurance policies taken out for the Italian shipments of the company. However, a register would have helped the reader to understand the lengthy Italian texts. The book also contains an index revealing the Croatian versions of the Italian names of the Ragusan patricians.

Although it is difficult to find any defects in the demanding volume, I would like to draw attention to two things. As no Hungarian works were published in the last century on the history of Ragusa, it would have been worth devoting some pages to the history of the city state and its relationship with the Kingdom of Hungary in the introductory study, because now only the readers familiar with the era can appreciate the

value of the book. It is joyful that German readers are also addressed, but the Hungarian part of the volume is completely uninteresting for them in the same way as Hungarian readers could also skip some 80 pages. That is, Antal Molnár's excellent book would have deserved two separate volumes: one for German and one for Hungarian readers.

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